

Abbott (F.)

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DELIVERED BEFORE THE

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DENTAL SCIENCE,

AT THEIR

FIFTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING,

Held in Boston, October 25, 1882,

BY

FRANK ABBOTT, M.D.

BOSTON:

BEACON PRESS: THOMAS TODD, 1 SOMERSET STREET.

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MR. PRESIDENT, AND MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DENTAL SCIENCE:

In response to the invitation I had the honor to receive from your committee, to deliver the annual address before the Academy at this its fifteenth anniversary, I have, with no little hesitation, and I might add, with no little pleasure, consented to undertake the honored task. I hesitated because, judging from the gentlemen who have preceded me in delivering the annual address before this Academy, that an oratorical effort would be required which would prove too much for my modest pretensions. However, I concluded that I would be among sympathizing friends should I fail to come up to the true Boston standard of eloquence. With this view of the situation, I accepted the invitation, and am now before you to fulfill that acceptance as best I can. It is with a degree of pleasure which to me is very difficult of expression that I come back to my native New England, that section of this great country which has done more toward the dissemination of education, honesty, and enterprise in almost every walk of life which has an elevating influence upon a people, than all other sections of the country combined, to speak to an audience of educated professional gentlemen such as I see before me. It was in the city of Boston where I first essayed to earn my own

bread after leaving my paternal roof in the rock-bound hills of Maine. This city and its people I have always felt a peculiar affection for ; consequently it gives me pleasure to be here, and with you.

I do not expect on this occasion to present to you anything particularly new, startling, nor possibly even interesting ; but what I propose to do is, to give you an outline of the past and present status of the specialty of dental surgery, and what I hope for the future.

Herodotus, the father of historians, who wrote about the year 410 B. C., tells us that among the Egyptians there were physicians who devoted themselves to the treatment of the teeth, as well as other parts of the body, such as the eye, the ear, the lungs, etc. It will be observed that, at the earliest period of which we have any account, the men who practiced upon the teeth were educated physicians, the same as those who practiced any other specialty in medicine. Very little is known, it is true, of their attainments, further than the alleged fact that teeth in the mouths of mummies have been found ^{covered} ~~filled~~ with gold, and others fastened to gold plates, made of ivory or wood. It would seem from this that the ancient Egyptians were familiar with some of the processes practiced at the present day, and which are commonly regarded as modern inventions.

For several centuries subsequent to the writings of Herodotus, very little, if anything, is known of dentistry or of its practice. Some of the Greek and Latin poets speak of artificial teeth ; but, until the works of Galen appeared, which were written in the second century, this science appears almost a blank. These were the first and only works upon the subject for some fourteen centuries, or until the works of Fallopius, Eustachius, and Ambrose Paré appeared in the sixteenth century.

It was this period from the second to the sixteenth century which has very appropriately been called "The Dark Ages." It was like a long, dismal night, when the virtuous and enlightened communities of the former all-powerful Rome sank into ignorance and debauchery, or were overwhelmed by Northern barbarians who, flushed with success and encouraged by the spoils of their conquests, carried their arms to her very heart; so that, at length, wasted by repeated ravages, nothing remained of this once proud mistress of the world save the grandeur of her splendid ruins. Dentistry, as well as all other sciences and arts, during the greater part of these ages found a resting-place only in those records which detailed the customs and portrayed the refinement of ancient days. For some two centuries subsequent to the writings of Fallopius, Eustachius, and Ambrose Paré, very little, if any, progress seems to have been made. During the eighteenth century the attention of the medical profession in England and France was directed to the subject, and several elaborate works were published devoted to it. Prominent among these was the treatise of John Hunter, which appeared from the years 1771 to 1778, and which laid the foundation not only of the English but of the modern school of dentistry. From the foregoing it will be observed that nothing was known of dental surgery previous to the eighteenth century by any except regularly educated physicians. Very soon, however, it appears that watchmakers and jewelers, desiring to increase their sphere of usefulness and their exchequer at the same time, commenced practicing upon the teeth. Here we find the first account given of an irregular practice of a branch of the healing art. Very soon thereafter their ranks were increased by the addition of barbers, who, together with the watchmakers and jewelers,

controlled the practice for many years; and I have no doubt that many representatives of those trades are still to be found in dental practice. From them modern practical dentistry has grown. I say modern practical dentistry, because all, or nearly all, those who had written upon the subject up to that time were regular physicians and surgeons, and not practical dentists. Is it any wonder, in view of these facts, that dentistry as practiced by these men was looked upon by physicians and surgeons, as well as the public, as a mechanical art, and dentists as mere mechanics? I say, Is this at all to be wondered at, when men were assuming to practice a specialty of medicine and surgery, and to teach it as well, who were entirely ignorant of its first principles? You may say that, but for these mechanics, dentistry would not have advanced as rapidly as it has. Such may possibly be the case; but its advancement would have been more respectable, I feel quite certain. It was felt, however, by many then practicing, that an education more comprehensive and thorough should be possessed by men who were constantly operating upon living human beings. This feeling manifested itself in this country as early as the year 1839, when the first dental college was established. While I regret very much that the degree of "Doctor of Dental Surgery" was ever established, except as a "post-graduate degree," at the same time I cannot help feeling and expressing a great admiration for the pioneers in the great work of dental education in this country. You may think it strange for one engaged as I am, and have been for so many years, in teaching, and assisting in conferring this degree, to express these sentiments; but there are circumstances in the lives of us all which transpire in spite of our better inclinations. This is a case in point. My colleagues, and I think the profession

in general, understand my feelings in reference to this matter, as I have never hesitated to express them whenever occasions presented themselves. Not that the degree of D.D.S., if properly worked for and conferred, is not a great step in advance of the old office instruction, but it is like being content with a slice of bread when we want and could have, by a little honest hard work, a whole loaf. And when we take into consideration that the possession of this loaf is the very thing which would place the dental practitioner, professionally and socially, on an equal footing with all other specialists in medicine, it does seem worth the time, labor, and money spent to obtain it. I know the great desire of young men, in entering upon a professional life, is to get just education enough to enable them to make money. Any education beyond that is too often considered superfluous, and the time, labor, and money spent in obtaining it, thrown away. This seems to be the predominating idea with a large majority of young men. "How long will it take to obtain a *diploma* from your college? How much will it cost? Can I get a diploma by attending one winter course? Can you give me any idea of what the examinations will consist?" These and many other like questions are constantly being asked by the would-be graduate of some respectable college. It is evidently not the *education* such men desire, but the *diploma*; that is the talisman which, if once in their possession, will bring, in their opinion, a lucrative business. This is the legitimate outgrowth of the watchmaker, silversmith, and barber practice of Europe, in generations gone by.

Let us for a moment glance at the standing of dentistry in Europe today. I believe that in some countries laws exist which compel men to pass an examination previous

to their beginning the practice of dentistry, but in many of them any one who wishes can begin the practice without even any preparation whatever. Since the time of John Hunter there seem to have been two distinct classes of men calling themselves dentists: one class, regularly educated physicians and surgeons, cultured gentlemen, and much more scientific than practical; the other, altogether practical, with no pretensions to scientific knowledge at all. The one has held itself aloof from the other just in proportion as, in their estimation, a scientifically educated man is superior to the merest mechanic. The result has been that the practical men have seemingly contented themselves with a low and almost degraded position; consequently very little intercourse prevails between the two classes. No help is offered from the one to the other, except that the doors of educational institutions have always been open, and all who desired were allowed to enter and were cordially received. Notwithstanding this fact, very few of the rank and file have availed themselves of these opportunities. What do we see as the result? That the most of European dentists are no better educated now than their fathers, or perhaps their grandfathers, in the profession were before them. As an evidence of this I will give some statistical figures from the *Dentists' Register* in England. Out of 5,289 names which appear, only 533 have given positive evidence of either a medical or dental education. The fault is often laid at the doors of the people, who, it is claimed, do not appreciate education in dentists, whether it be practical or otherwise. This may be true; but the unfortunate part of it is, that very few of them have tried a good education in all that pertains to dental surgery, to see whether the people would appreciate them the more or not. There is too much of a tend-

ency to follow the Chinese teachings of Confucius in this matter: "What their fathers and grandfathers did, is good enough for them," and it would be sacrilegious in them to do otherwise. In some European countries a change for the better has already commenced, and I hope it will soon extend to them all.

How stands the record in our own country? Up to the time Dr. Eleazar Parmly commenced the practice, a majority of those in the profession here were Europeans, and very few, if any, of them, as far as I can learn, were what would be called educated men, but were simple mechanics, who could do, for their time, a fair piece of mechanical work, to which branch their attention was almost entirely directed. Very little, if anything, was known of dental surgery proper. I presume I would hardly be accused of making an extravagant remark should I designate Dr. Eleazar Parmly the father of dental surgery as now practiced. While giving due credit to those of his colaborers who did much toward its elevation and added greatly to its luster, still, the fact is, he was the man who, more than all others, gave dentistry its superior standing in this country, and the first in the world who attracted any special attention for his skill in saving the natural teeth, and as a gentleman of education and refinement. Notwithstanding the eminent position occupied by Dr. Parmly, I am sorry to say that very few were inclined to follow his example; but, instead, the majority were content with mediocrity. The all-pervading idea was, to make money, or I should say a living, with the least possible amount of study and preparation.

I have before remarked that a college was organized and put into operation in the winter of 1839-40. Certain regulations, such as were thought necessary at that time, for

the education and graduation of men were adopted. That, I want you to remember, was over forty years ago. We think great advances have been made during that time, not only in our specialty, but in every other in medicine and surgery. Notwithstanding, the same regulations, if I mistake not, are in force in that institution today, and the same requisites for graduation are demanded. It would be natural to suppose that institutions of learning would keep pace with the general advance of the profession; but such does not seem to be the case with all dental colleges. They have sprung up in almost every part of the country, and the great, grand idea appears to be, with too many of them, how little they can demand of men for them to receive their degree of D.D.S. In view of these facts, would it not be a little strange for the medical profession to extend to graduates of dental schools the right hand of fellowship? Another formidable barrier presents itself against the recognition of dentists by medical men. It is, that probably not one third of the dentists in this country are graduates of any college. Still, we constantly hear men complaining that they are not properly treated or recognized by physicians. If there were any valid reasons why dentists should not be as well and liberally educated as other specialists in medicine and surgery, then there might be some grounds for such complaints; but I have yet to hear the first good reason from any man why he should not be as thoroughly grounded in the fundamental principles of anatomy, physiology, chemistry, surgery, pathology, and therapeutics, to practice dental surgery, as others are to practice any other specialty. When dentists recognize and act upon the teachings of these facts, then, and not till then, will the medical profession extend to them the respect and courtesy due from one physician to another.

The time has come when every one who has the elevation of our specialty at heart should put forth every possible effort to encourage young men entering and those already in the profession to become more thoroughly and liberally educated. Men of old and middle age will soon have passed out of practice, and perhaps will have been "gathered to their fathers," and the profession and its practice will fall into the hands of the young. It is, therefore, to the young men that we look for a better education and the future advance in the status of our specialty. I hope to live to see the time when no young man will think of beginning the practice of dental surgery until he has mastered general medicine and surgery sufficiently to have received the degree of "Doctor of Medicine." I know very well that the question you would be apt to ask is, How are poor young men to obtain such an education as you would demand? I would answer with the oft-repeated and truthful assertion that "where there is a will there is a way." Yes, a way will surely be found to obtain all the education any young man may desire, provided he has an unyielding determination to procure it. The great difficulty is, that young men are often too easily satisfied with their attainments. When, after a pupilage of six or twelve months, a degree can be obtained by attending one course at a college, do you suppose such advantages are not going to be made the most of, and the majority of them be satisfied with such marked attainments? An experience of fifteen years as a teacher, and in almost constant contact with young men, I am sorry to say compels me to answer in the affirmative. This, however, is not altogether the fault of those entering the profession. Many men of years of experience, who have never been earnest enough, or thought enough of themselves or the profession, to become

sufficiently educated to receive a degree, say and do all they can to discourage students; many of whom, were a little encouragement offered, would not only become *educated men*, but would be honored, and make brilliant examples of the progressive minds in the profession. The importance of this subject, Mr. President, is almost vital to our specialty, and hardly less so to the patients upon whom we practice.

In several States in the Union, before beginning practice, young men are obliged to possess either the degree of M.D. or D.D.S., or have passed a satisfactory examination before a board of censors of the State society in which they propose to practice; and, ere many years have passed, I trust this will be the case in every State. Until comparatively recently, the importance of laws regulating the practice of dentistry was not brought home forcibly to the minds of public men; and even now, I am sorry to say, the legislatures of some of the States do not fully realize the importance of such laws. It is sometimes astonishingly remarkable what little interest the public and public men take in the educational qualifications men are possessed of who are to practice upon them in any department of medical science.

Laws regulating the practice of any profession, I believe, never originate with the public, or their "representatives in legislature assembled," but always among the general or special practitioners, who desire those contemplating such practice to become properly qualified before beginning. This, it is usually said, is because those already in the profession wish to be *protected*. Protected from what? may I ask. From unscrupulous men, who would do, or attempt to do, anything desired of them for less money, and thus degrade the profession? Is that all? If so, it is very evi-

dent that the people have more to fear from such uneducated men; for, not only are they robbed of their money, but their health, yes, their very lives even, are at the mercy of these men. Still, I say, in some of the States of this great American Union the legislatures refuse to pass laws to protect the people against uneducated malpractitioners. It is the public, not dentists, that needs the protection. I venture to assert that the men who have always been foremost in urging and working for laws to regulate the practice of any profession, in this or any other country, were those who were the least to be affected by such laws when passed. It is often said that nothing of importance is undertaken by men without a selfish motive. This perhaps is too often true; but what can be the benefit accruing to gentlemen who are blessed with honored positions, and abundant practices in their profession, as compared with those secured to the people by the enactment of laws compelling men to become competently proficient before beginning the practice of a profession where the health and lives of so many are at stake? Such questions I leave for the public and public men to answer.

In returning to the subject of the education of young men, I will take the liberty of quoting from the annual address delivered before this Academy in 1878, by Charles W. Eliot, LL.D., President of Harvard University. He says: "Many eminent dentists have regretted the institution of a special dental degree, and have maintained that every dentist should be a doctor of medicine. Let it be granted at once, as a fact beyond dispute, that the full training of a physician and surgeon would be useful to a dentist. He who should follow the three-years' course for the doctorate in medicine, and should then give eighteen months or two years to the peculiar studies of dentistry,

would be a much better trained man than he who has given but three years in all to professional study. But it is obvious that only those who have extraordinary zeal, and an unusual amount of money to expend upon their education, will pursue that excellent course."

As this reads, it seems well enough, certainly, to laymen, but to educated dentists it will admit of more or less elaboration. Why have "many eminent dentists regretted the institution of a special dental degree?" Because it is an inferior degree to that of the mother profession; because no other specialty in medicine has a distinctive degree; because the possession of the dental degree alone does not place its owner upon an equal footing with other specialists, either professionally or otherwise. "Let it be granted at once," he says, "as a fact beyond dispute, that the full training of a physician and surgeon would be useful to a dentist." Let us see wherein such a training would be useful. First, it would make the dentist a peer in professional and social standing with other physicians. His mind would be trained in a broader field of study; he would more readily comprehend the pathological conditions which he is called upon to treat, and his treatment would of necessity be more accurately directed to the alleviation of such conditions. Many operations which are now performed by the general surgeon would be referred to the men who would make the mouth and its environs their special field of operations. Then it would be that the dental surgeon would more frequently be called in consultation, and his opinions would have the same weight that one surgeon's has with another and with the public. That the man who follows the study of medicine and dentistry long enough to obtain both the general and special degree is a better-trained man — a man in whom more confidence

can be placed—I think is beyond a question; but, as the gentleman above quoted has said, “It is obvious that only those who have extraordinary zeal, and an unusual amount of money to expend upon their education, will pursue that excellent course.” This “extraordinary zeal” is the inspiration every young man should be possessed of, and no effort should be spared by every lover of our great and noble profession to encourage all, upon their entrance into it, to earnestly foster it.

But for this “extraordinary zeal,” would the great Daniel Webster have become the world-renowned scholar and orator he was—the man before whom the entire nation bowed, and who, when addressing an audience, commanded more respect and attention than could any man America ever produced? As a young man he was poor. He had no “unusual amount of money to expend upon his education,” but instead, after he had graduated from college, studied law; and, having been admitted to the bar, he earned and paid the money which was still due for his education.

Again, but for this “extraordinary zeal,” would we have had the “learned blacksmith?” or would Elihu Burrit have contented himself with his forge and anvil, and read the Sacred Volume in plain English instead of in its original language, and been happy? It was his earnest craving after knowledge that kept him during his working as well as his leisure hours incessantly studying books. He, like Daniel Webster, was poor, dependent entirely upon his earnings at his trade for a living and the means to educate himself. The result of his zeal was, that in a few years he mastered no less than fifty different languages; became known as one of the most learned men in the country, and as a writer and lecturer had few equals.

His own estimate of his life-work is thus given in his

own language: "All that I have accomplished, or expect or hope to accomplish, has been, and will be, by that plodding, patient, persevering process of accretion which builds the ant-heap, particle by particle, thought by thought, fact by fact. If I was ever actuated by ambition, its highest and warmest aspiration reached no further than the hope to set before the young men of my country an example in employing those invaluable fragments of time called "odd moments."

But for the same "extraordinary zeal" this great nation would not have been called upon to mourn the death of its late honored President. James A. Garfield would undoubtedly have remained to this day in obscurity, and perhaps still have been connected with the canal interests of the country, had he not been blessed with an ardent desire for knowledge. You all know through what trials he had to pass to obtain it, and what glorious results were achieved by this great man.

I might go on almost indefinitely enumerating instances, many of them even among those of our own profession, where this "extraordinary zeal" has manifested itself in a manner worthy of imitation; but I will forbear, fearing that it might become tiresome, and thus its objects be defeated. I feel, however, that such examples of earnest seekers after knowledge cannot be too often held up to the view of young men who are about beginning a professional life. The field of our specialty is wonderfully broad—much more so than would seem to a casual observer in a dental office; yes, much more so than is recognized by (as they claim to be) some of our leading dental colleges. Advertisements are sent broadcast over the world, stating in about as many words that such a college will, in its final examination for graduation, demand nothing except a practical knowledge

of dentistry, provided the candidate proposes only to practice dentistry ; but, if he intends to practice *oral surgery*, he must study anatomy, physiology, chemistry, pathology, materia medica and therapeutics, as well as oral surgery. In the one case, the same as the other, the graduate receives the same degree of Doctor of Dental Surgery.

In another, a university, all men upon entering are required to pass a satisfactory examination except those for the dental department, thus making a marked distinction between the dental and other students, to the great disadvantage and almost degradation of the former. Others accept students after a few months' pupilage, and graduate them at the end of but one course or winter session. These are facts, gentlemen, which cannot be gainsaid. Can it be possible for a profession to elevate itself, in its own estimation or in the estimation of the world at large, while this state of things exists? I think the answer would come in the *negative*, very readily, too, from every thinking man, whether he be in the profession or out of it. What I wish and hope yet to see is, that all universities in which a dental department has been established shall not only demand the same entrance examinations as they do of others, but shall require all dental students to first obtain the degree of Doctor of Medicine before receiving a special degree in dentistry ; and that all independent dental colleges shall receive no students until they have the degree of M.D. This would elevate the status of the specialty of dental surgery to that point where it would command the unqualified respect of all men, both professional and laymen.

That, in the minds of many good men in the profession, this would be too radical a step to be taken at once, I am aware ; but, Mr. President and gentlemen, if we will take

into account the fact that no trade, whether it be carpenter, blacksmith, cabinet-maker, plumber, or what not, can be learned by ~~a~~ young man, even in this country, in less time than three years, it does seem that it is not asking too much to require them to spend four and a half or five years to prepare themselves for the practice of so important a profession as ours.

Again let me urge upon young men the necessity for encouraging in themselves this extraordinary desire for an education in their profession which shall reflect credit not only upon themselves, but upon the profession they expect to represent.



